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AUTHOR	Shapiro, Phyllis P.; Shapiro, Bernard J.
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ABSTRACT

The effects on written composition of two reading approaches--traditional orthography (TO) and the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.)--are compared. Two hundred and ninety-three first graders and 391 second graders, half of whom had learned reading with TO and half with i.t.a., were each asked to write two compositions. These essays were rated on length, vocabulary level, originality, emotional content, and overall communication, and the ratings of the i.t.a. and TO groups in both grades were compared. It was found that the first-grade i.t.a. essays were longer, on a more advanced vocabulary level, and more original than the TO group, but that there were no significant differences in the other ratings. In the second-grade group the differences between the i.t.a. and TO groups were not significant. The author points out that the rating scales might not have been appropriate for this particular sample and that a different scale of ratings might produce a different outcome. It was concluded that the causality of written behavior is more complex than simply the medium for beginning reading instruction. Tables and references are included. (AL)

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ABSTRACT

The Effect of Reading Method on Composition

Phyllis P. Shapiro
Emmanuel College

Bernard J. Shapiro
Boston University

Purpose

Reading is only one aspect of the language arts, and a further value often claimed for i.t.a. is that it stimulates children's creative writing. Most of the studies done comparing i.t.a. and T.O. in terms of their effect on written work have tended to favor the work of the i.t.a. samples. The dimensions studied, however, have been restricted to such continua as the number of running words, spelling, vocabulary level, etc. The present study was undertaken to investigate these dimensions as well as higher order continua such as originality, the ability to communicate ideas on paper, etc.

Method

293 first graders (both i.t.a. and T.O. pupils) and 391 second graders (155 of whom had learned to read with i.t.a.) took part in the study. Each subject wrote two compositions. Aspects of the essays considered were (1) length of composition and vocabulary level, and (2) ratings of various dimensions of essay content and communication value.

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Results

At the grade one level, the essays of the i.t.a. sample were longer and more 'original' than those of the T.O. group, but these differences were no longer evident in the grade two group. On all other dimensions, there were no statistically significant differences between the groups at either grade level.

Implications of the results are discussed in terms of (a) the relationship between written behavior and reading method, and (b) rating scales.

The Effect of Reading Method on Composition- i.t.a. vs. T.O.

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Bernard J. Shapiro
Boston University

Phyllis P. Shapiro
Emmanuel College

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Introduction

The major emphasis of the research devoted over the past several years to the study of the initial teaching alphabet (i.t.a.) has been, quite naturally, on i.t.a.'s value as a medium for instruction in beginning reading. Reading, however, is only one aspect of the language arts curriculum, and a further value often claimed for i.t.a. is that it stimulates children's creative writing behavior. The most common explanations given for this phenomenon are (1) that the typically higher reading level achieved by the i.t.a. first grader gives him more complex models to draw upon in his written work, and (2) that the consistency of the i.t.a. sound-symbol relationship enables the child to write without concern for the intricacies of spelling in the traditional orthography (T.O.). Thus, at least in these two respects, the child's creative energies may be concentrated on the substance rather than the mechanics of the writing task, and his written work may be brought more closely into line with his spoken expression.

Some research, (e.g., Mazurkiewicz, 1966; Downing, 1967), has been done on the comparison of i.t.a. and T.O. in terms of their effect on written work, and the results have almost uniformly tended to favor the work of the i.t.a. samples. The dimensions studied, however, seem to have been restricted to such continua as the number

of running words, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary level, etc. In order to investigate not only these but also such higher-order continua such as originality and the ability to communicate ideas on paper, the present authors undertook a limited study of written work in the first and second grade classes of a metropolitan school district.

The Subject Sample

Eleven first grade and eighteen second grade classes took part in the study. Of the 293 first grade children, 130 were receiving their reading instruction, (and doing their writing), in i.t.a. while the remaining 163 were working in T.O. All of the 391 second grade children were in second grade T.O. programs and using Lippincott basal readers, but 155 of them had used i.t.a. through the end of grade one.

The Work Sample

In that aspect of the study to be reported here, each of the 684 children in the participating classes were given the same two written assignments. In the first of these, ("The Puppies"), both a visual and an auditory stimulus was provided. The visual stimulus consisted of a picture of a young boy and girl playing with several puppies while the auditory stimulus consisted of the following material read aloud by the classroom teacher:

I am going to give each of you a picture. We are going to write about it.

> Now look at the picture. We can see a boy, a girl, and some puppies. Who owns the puppies and how did they get them? What are the puppies' names? Who are the children? What are they going to do next?

> On your paper, write a story about what is happening in this picture and what you think of it.

In the second assignment, ("The Moon"), given one week later, no visual stimulus was given. Each child was simply provided with a blank piece of paper, and he listened to the following directions given by the teacher:

> On nice days, we can see the sun, and on nice nights we can see the moon. We all know what it is like to live in our city. Now, I want you to think about what it would be like to visit the moon.
>
> What would you do to get ready for your trip? What would you take with you? How would you get to the moon and what kind of things would you see there? What kind of people might be there and how would they look? Where would you go to have fun? When would you come back home?
>
> Now, on your paper, write a story about your visit to the moon.

Previous researchers, in making i.t.a./T.O. comparisons in terms of written work, had generally based their analyses on matched pairs of students. A somewhat different approach was used here. From each of the grade levels and for each of the two writing assignments, random samples of the compositions were drawn as follows:

Table 1 about here

and these were the compositions on which the analytical work was done.

The Analysis

Two general kinds of analyses were done: (1) objective "counting" analyses, and (2) subjective rating analyses. Each of these will be considered separately.

The Counting Analyses

The objective "counting" analyses were concerned with two continua: (1) the length of the compositions, and (2) their vocabulary level. The length of the compositions was measured in terms of the number of running words, and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

These results indicate that in Grade One, while they were still in i.t.a., the i.t.a. children wrote significantly longer compositions than did their T.O. counterparts, but that by the end of Grade Two there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. The apparently large difference between the Grade Two i.t.a. and the T.O. groups in relation to the "Moon" essay was statistically non-significant because of the very large variances involved in both cases.

The vocabulary level of the compositions was determined by the proportion of difficult words used. A difficult word was defined as a word not on the Dale List of 769 Easy Words, and the proportions of such "difficult" words used are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 about here

These data show that the i.t.a. samples in each case used a somewhat greater proportion of "difficult" words than did the T.O. groups thus indicating a somewhat more advanced vocabulary level. This difference between the groups, however, was statistically significant in only one of the four cases. Parenthetically, the somewhat higher proportion of "difficult" words used by both

groups in the Moon essays is probably simply a reflection of the general advance in space interest since the publication of the Dale List.

The Rating Analyses

The rating scales used were adopted from work done by E.P. Torrance in his studies on creativity (Torrance, 1965) and by C. B. Smith of Western Reserve University in his planning for studies of written work in the elementary school. The two major dimensions included were (a) Content and (b) Overall Communication. Content was measured by open-ended scales of originality, use of rhetorical devices, and evidence of emotion and involvement, (with one point given for each unusual ending, surprise, use of example, evidence of personal involvement, etc.). Overall Communication was measured on a simple five-point scale, (failing, poor, fair, competent, superior), covering the child's general proficiency in the composition.

Prior to rating, the i.t.a. compositions were typed leaving their syntax intact but correcting any faulty spelling. The raters were six elementary school teachers. Three grade one teachers rated the grade one work, while three grade two teachers rated the grade two materials. Each "teacher-raters" rated all of the compositions, (both i.t.a. and T.O.), at her grade level, and each composition was assigned the mean of the three ratings on each of the judged dimensions. Analysis of the data revealed that the correlation between the Content and Communication scales was +.55 for the grade one essays and +.54 for the grade two material. The inter-rater reliabilities for the Content and Communication scales

were +.71 and +.82 respectively.

The actual rating results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 about here

As can be seen from this table, they indicate that there is little difference between the i.t.a. and T.O. groups in terms of these ratings. In grade one, the i.t.a. essays do show evidence of significantly greater originality, but even this difference is no longer evidence in grade two. On all the other dimensions, there are no statistically significant differences at all.

Discussion

Does the present data show that the use of i.t.a. as opposed to T.O. as a medium for beginning reading instruction in itself results in an improvement in the general level of creative writing in the first and second grade? In terms of the objective "counting" analysis, the data support the previous research in that at the first grade level, the i.t.a. essays, as compared with those of the T.O. sample, were both longer and/or a more advanced vocabulary level. At the end of the second grade, however, these differences between the i.t.a. and T.O. groups had disappeared. In terms of the subjective rating analyses, there were no significant differences between the two sample groups at either grade level with the exception of the "originality" sub-scale in which the first grade i.t.a. compositions were rated more highly than the first grade T.O. compositions.

It is, however, important to point out that there is a serious question as to the relevance of the Content rating scales. In these scales, one point was to be given for each unusual ending, use of

humor, use of dialogue, evidence of personal involvement with the story, etc., etc., but as shown in Table 4, the mean ratings for these content sub-scales were all less than unity indicating that a great many of the compositions were assigned zero ratings. That is, these scales did not seem to be entirely appropriate to the output of this sample group; more appropriate scales may have yielded some aspects of a different outcome.

In summary, the present data suggest that although i.t.a. is an aid in creative writing behavior in the first grade, this relative advantage, (at least under the present instructional system), is lost by the end of the second grade. It would appear that the causality of written behavior is considerably more complex than the medium for beginning reading instruction.

References

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Mazurkiewicz, Albert J. First Grade Reading Using Modified Co-Basal Versus the Initial Teaching Alphabet. Report of Cooperative Research Project No. 2676. USOE, Washington, 1966.

Torrance, E.P. Gifted Children in the Classroom. New York: Macmillan Co., 1965.

Table 1

The Sample N's

Composition	Grade One		Grade Two	
	i.t.a.	T.O.	i.t.a.	T.O.
The Puppies	38	38	38	38
The Moon	40	40	35	35

Table 2

Mean Number of Words Per Composition

Composition	Grade One			Grade Two		
	i.t.a.	T.O.	t	i.t.a.	T.O.	t
The Puppies	51.58	33.53	2.54*	59.76	61.29	-.13
The Moon	47.10	27.03	3.47*	103.23	75.51	.19

*statistically significant at the one percent level

Table 3

Proportion of Words Used Not on the Dale List of 769 Easy Words

Composition	Grade One			Grade Two		
	i.t.a.	T.O.	z	i.t.a	T.O.	z
The Puppies	.10	.08	1.00	.10	.08	1.42
The Moon	.20	.16	2.00*	.16	.14	1.43

*statistically significant at the five percent level

Table 4

Mean Ratings

Composition	Grade One			Grade Two		
	i.t.a.	T.O.	t	i.t.a.	T.O.	t
The Puppies						
Content						
Originality	.36	.12	2.18*	.33	.29	.33
Rhetoric	.26	.15	1.00	.32	.33	-.07
Emotion	.51	.50	.07	.37	.47	-.10
Total	1.10	.80	1.36	1.02	1.09	-.25
Communication	2.40	2.10	1.58	2.85	2.66	.86
The Moon						
Content						
Originality	.39	.20	2.11*	.53	.44	.75
Rhetoric	.29	.22	.79	.66	.47	1.19
Emotion	1.04	1.12	-.73	1.04	1.03	.09
Total	1.71	1.54	1.18	2.22	1.87	.86
Communication	2.58	2.35	1.77	2.82	2.63	1.12

*statistically significant at the five percent level.